

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3939

INFO DIA DOD WASHDC

USCINCSO

AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY LA PAZ

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 8404

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MILI, ASEC, AR

SUBJECT: AIR FORCE REVOLT: RECAPITULATION AND AFTERMATH

REF: A) BA 8277

B) BA 8294

C) BA 8351

D) SMITH-FELDER TELECON OF DECEMBER 24

1. SUMMARY: SOME OF THE APPARENT INCONSISTENCIES IN THE RECENT AIR FORCE REVOLT CAN NOW BE SEEN IN BETTER PERSPECTIVE. AT A GIVEN MOMENT, MRS. PERON COULD ONLY HAVE CRUSHED IT BY CALLING ON THE ARMY, WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE RESPONDED. SHE WAS, THEREFORE, VERY MUCH IN A BOX. VIDELA, TOO, HOWEVER, SAW HIS OWN POSITION THREATENED BY THE REVOLT. HE THEREFORE HAD AGOSTI ISOLATE THE ULTRA-RIGHT LEADERS AND PUT THEM DOWN. THIS WAS SUCCESSFUL BUT COULD HAVE A HIGH PRICE FURTHER DOWN THE ROAD. WITH FAUTARIO
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OUT OF THE WAY, THE ARMED FORCES EMERGED BETTER COORDINATED AND

MORE UNITED THAN BEFORE--AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. VIDELA EMERGED AS THE DEFENDER OF CONSTITUTIONALISM, AND THE ARMY'S SUBSEQUENT VICTORY OVER THE TERRORISTS OAT MONTE CHINGOLO AND VIDELA'S IMPRESSIVE CHRISTMAS EVE SPEECH FURTHER STRENGTHENED HIS HAND--AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT. IN THE LONG RUN, BOTH ARMED FORCES UNITY AND VIDELA'S OWN POSITION DEPEND UPON WHETHER OR NOT A POLITICAL SOLUTION IS SOON PRODUCED. HARDLINERS, BOTH CIVILIAN AND MILITARY, WERE IRRITATED BY VIDELA'S REFUSAL TO THROW IN WITH CAPELLINI AND TOPPLE MRS. PERON STRAIGHT AWAY. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT VIDELA PROMISED QUICK POLITICAL SOLUTIONS (MOST IMPORTANTLY, THAT MRS. PERON WOULD BE LEVERED ASIDE) IN ORDER TO HOLD THEM AT BAY. IF SUCH SOLUTIONS ARE NOT FORTHCOMING WITHIN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, VIDELA WILL FACE NEW CHALLENGES AND SPLITS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. END SUMMARY.

2. WHY WAS FAUTARIO RELEASED? DAO SOURCES HAVE CLEARED UP THE MYSTERY OF WHY FAUTARIO WAS RELEASED. THE GOVERNMENT NAMED AGOSTI THE NEW AF CINC AT 2 P.M. ON DECEMBER 18 AND SO NOTIFIED CAPELLINI. THE LATTER HAD NO FURTHER INTEREST IN FAUTARIO AND RELEASED HIM. FAUTARIO, HOWEVER, UNAWARE THAT A NEW CINC HAD BEEN NAMED, RETURNED TO AF HEADQUARTERS AND ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS RESUMING HIS DUTIES. WHEN DEFENSE MINISTER VOTTERO INFORMED FAUTARIO THAT HE WAS NO LONGER THE CINC, FAUTARIO REFUSED TO STEP DOWN. IT WAS NOT UNTIL ABOUT 9 P.M. THAT HE CONCEDED. IT WAS FOR THIS REASON THAT THE DECREE NAMING AGOSTI THE NEW AF CINC WAS NOT PUBLISHED UNTIL 10:30 P.M. AND THAT HE WAS NOT SWORN IN UNTIL AFTER MIDNIGHT. MEANWHILE, CAPELLINI HAD CONTINUED HIS REVOLT, EVEN THOUGH FAUTARIO WAS NO LONGER A FACTOR. CAPELLINI WAS NOW DEMANDING NOTHING LESS THAN THE OUSTER OF THE GOVERNMENT AND ITS REPLACEMENT BY A MILITARY REGIME.

3. WHY VIDELA DID NOT SUPPORT CAPELLINI. AS INDICATED EARLIER IN EMBASSY SITREPS, CAPELLINI REPRESENTED THE FAR RIGHT-WING AND WANTED TO BRING INTO POWER AN OUT-AND-OUT MILITARY GOVERNMENT. VIDELA IS A MODERATE, A PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER IN EVERY SENSE OF THE WORD, A CONSTITUTIONALIST, AND WHILE UNDERSTANDING THAT MRS. PERON MUST BE MOVED ASIDE, WANTS TO LEAVE POWER IN CIVILIAN HANDS IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. HAD VIDELA JOINED IN CAPELLINI'S REVOLT, OR HAD HE MOVED TO OUST MRS. PERON WHILE IT

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WAS STILL GOING ON, HE WOULD HAVE THEN HAD TO CONTEND WITH A STRENGTHENED RIGHT WING WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. HE MIGHT EVEN HAVE APPEARED BEHOLDEN TO THEM AND IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FAR MORE DIFFICULT TO HOLD OUT FOR A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. FURTHER, THE ARMY NEVER LIKES TO HITCH ITS OWN FORTUNES TO AN AIR FORCE (OR NAVY) INITIATIVE. VIDELA HAD HIS OWN PLANS AND STUCK TO THEM DESPITE CAPELLINI'S INTERFERENCE. IT WAS LOGICAL THAT HE DID SO.

4. WHY DID VIDELA AND AGOSTI SIMPLY NOT SIT BACK AND WATCH?
AT A GIVEN MOMENT, IT APPEARED THAT MOST MAJOR AF BASES HAD GONE OVER THE TO THE REBELS. AS INDICATED IN REF A, MRS PERON COULD NOT HAVE PUT DOWN THE REBELLION WITHOUT CALLING ON THE ARMY. IT SEEMED AT THE TIME, THEN, THAT VIDELA WAS IN AN EXCELLENT POSITION SIMPLY TO SIT BACK AND OBSERVE. IF SHE CALLED ON THE ARMY, VIDELA COULD IGNORE HER CALL, AND WHEN SHE COULD NOT PUT DOWN THE REVOLT, SHE WOULD HAVE FALLEN WITHOUT ANY OVERT MOVE AGAINST HER ON VIDELA'S PART. IT IS STILL A DEBATABLE POINT AS TO WHETHER OR NOT IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN WISER FOR VIDELA TO HAVE FOLLOWED THIS TACTIC. BE THAT AS IT MAY, VIDELA HIMSELF CHOSE NOT TO DO SO. APPARENTLY, HE FEARED THAT IF THE REVOLT WENT ON FOR LONG, OTHER HARDLINE LEADERS, INCLUDING SOME OF HIS OWN CORPS COMMANDERS, WOULD JOIN IN. THIS WOULD HAVE THREATENED HIS OWN POSITION AND MIGHT HAVE LEFT THE HARDLINERS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT. IT WOULD ALSO HAVE BEEN DAMAGING TO MILITARY DISCIPLINE. HENCE, VIDELA URGED AGOSTI TO GO AHEAD AND SUPPRESS THE CORE OF THE REBELLION. AGOSTI TALKED FAST TO THE OTHER SENIOR AF OFFICERS AND WON MOST OF THEM OVER TO HIM (SEE REF B). CLEARLY, HE GAVE ASSURANCES THAT MRS. PERON WOULD BE OUT SOON ANYWAY; THEREFORE, THERE WAS NO POINT IN CONTINUING THE REVOLT. BY THE AFTERNOON OF DECEMBER 21, AGOSTI HAD REDUCED THE REVOLT TO CAPELLINI AND HIS FOLLOWERS AT MORON AND AEROPARQUE. HE MOVED AGAINST THEM WITH PRUDENCE AND A DISPLAY OF FIREPOWER DESIGNED MORE TO INTIMIDATE THAN TO KILL. WITHOUT SHEDDING ANY BLOOD (A MOST IMPORTANT POINT FOR FUTURE UNITY), HE FORCED CAPELLINI TO SURRENDER.

5. VIDELA'S POSITION SUBSEQUENT TO REVOLT. VIDELA EMERGED THE VICTOR AND WITH AN ENHANCED IMAGE AS DEFENDER OF CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE INSTITUTIONS. THE ARMED FORCES' DRAMATIC VICTORY OVER THE TERRORISTS AT MONTE CHINGOLO ON DECEMBER 23 FURTHER STRENGTHENED VIDELA'S HAND (AS WELL AS THAT OF THE ARMED FORCES
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IN GENERAL), AS DID HIS CHRISTMAS EVEN SPEECH CALLING ON THE CIVILIAN POLITICIANS FOR DEFINITIONS AND SOLUTIONS AND THAT CORRUPTION AND IMMORALITY BE PUNISHED. ALSO ADDING TO HIS IMAGE WAS THE DEFT WAY IN WHICH HE FACED DOWN LORENZO MIGUEL AND BLOCKED THE INTERVENTION OF BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE ON DECEMBER 24 (SEE SEPTTEL). VIDELA IS, THEN, NOW IN A STRONGER POSITION THAN HE ENJOYED PRIOR TO THE AIR FORCE REVOLT. BUT IT IS A POSITION CONDITIONED BY A DEFINITE TIME FRAME. HE HELD OFF THE HARDLINERS BY PROMISING POLITICAL SOLUTIONS WITHIN A SHORT TIME--PROBABLY BY THE END OF JANUARY AND POSSIBLY A GOOD DEAL SOONER. HE CLEARLY HOPES THE CIVILIANS EVEN NOW CAN MOVE MRS. PERON ASIDE ON THEIR OWN--THROUGH THREAT OF IMPEACHMENT, PRESSURES FROM HER OWN PARTY OR SOME OTHER MEANS. IF THEY CANNOT, THEN VIDELA WILL HAVE THE CHOICE OF DOING IT HIMSELF, AT THE HEAD OF THE ARMED FORCES, OR FACE BEING OUSTED BY MEN LIKE GENERALS SUAREZ MASON, DIAZ BESSONE,

AND MENENDEZ, WHO WILL LEAD AN OUT-AND-OUT GOLPE. IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION, VIDELA IS TRYING TO STAY WITHIN THE CONSTITUTION. IF HE WINS, THERE IS A GOOD CHANCE THAT A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT WILL REPLACE MRS. PERON. IF HE LOSES, THEN CONSTITUTIONAL RULE IS PROBABLY OVER FOR SOME TIME TO COME.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 8404

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6. UNITY OF THE ARMED FORCES. THE OUSTER OF FAUTARIO HAS PRODUCED A GREATER SENSE OF UNITY AMONG THE THREE COMMANDERS. MASSERA AND VIDELA WERE ON THE SAME WAVE LENGTH TO BEGIN WITH. THE SOUR NOTE, FAUTARIO, IS OUT OF THE WAY AND HAS BEEN REPLACED BY AN OLD FRIEND OF VIDELA'S. AGOSTI AND VIDELA ARE FROM THE SAME SMALL TOWN IN BA PROVINCE, MERCEDES. FURTHER, AS DEMONSTRATED AT MONTE CHINGOLO, THERE IS NOW A MUCH IMPROVED COORDINATION AMONG THE SERVICES. AT MONTE CHINGOLO, THE AIR FORCE, ALONG WITH THE ARMY AND NAVY, RESPONDED RAPIDLY AND JOINED IN THE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE TERRORISTS. AS WITH VIDELA'S PERSONAL POSITION, HOWEVER, THIS GREATER UNITY IN THE ARMED FORCES COULD PROVE SHORT-LIVED UNLESS THERE ARE DRASTIC CHANGES

IN THE GOVERNMENT SOON--WITH MRS. PERON'S REMOVAL FROM THE SCENE IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER TOPPING THE LIST.

7. MRS. PERON WEAKENED. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, MRS. PERON'S GOVERNMENT EMERGED FROM THE CRISIS FURTHER WEAK-
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ENED, A SITUATION HER SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS HAVE DONE NOTHING TO IMPROVE. HER INANE SPEECH OF DECEMBER 22 (SEE REF C) ENRAGED SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS (WITH WHOM SHE REFUSED TO COORDINATE THE TEXT) AND HAS BECOME THE BUTT OF PUBLIC JOKES. FURTHER, IN THE WAKE OF SO SERIOUS A CRISIS, A CABINET SHAKE-UP WOULD HAVE BEEN THE LEAST ONE MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED OF MRS. PERON IF SHE WISHED TO DEFUSE THE SITUATION. YET, WHEN HER ENTIRE CABINET DID THE EXPECTED AND OFFERED THEIR RESIGNATIONS, ON DECEMBER 24, SHE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY REFUSED, INDICATING FULL CONFIDENCE IN ALL (SEE REF D). ONLY HER PRESS SECRETARY, ELOY REBORA, GOT THE BOUNCE. THIS WAS A MUST SINCE HE HAD RUN DIRECTLY AFOUL OF THE THREE CINCS (SEE SEPTTEL). SHE HARDLY PLEASED THE CINCS WITH HER CHOICE TO REPLACE REBORA. JORGE O. PAPALEO IS A PROTEGE OF LORENZO MIGUEL, WHO HAS JUST COME INTO DIRECT CONFLICT WITH VIDELA BECAUSE OF HIS INSISTENCE ON INTERVENING BA PROVINCE.

8. CGT DOES NOTHING. IN TERMS OF MRS. PERON'S POSITION, MORE-OVER, IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT WHILE THE CGT TALKED OF MASS MOBILIZATIONS, ETC., IN FACT THEY LIFTED NOT A FINGER UNTIL THE ISSUE WAS ALREADY CLEARLY DECIDED. ONLY ON DECEMBER 22 DID THEY DECIDE TO CALL A SIT-DOWN STRIKE. BY THEN THE REVOLT WAS OVER. IF THEY REALLY WISHED TO DEFEND MRS. PERON, ONE MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED A FAR MORE MILITANT POSITION.

9. CONCLUSIONS: WHILE THE AIR FORCE REVOLT TEMPORARILY CLOUDED THE IMAGE OF MILITARY UNITY, THE FACT THAT UNITY WAS RESTORED HAS OVERWEIGHED THAT NEGATIVE IMAGE. FURTHER, THE POSITIVE FACTORS--THAT FAUTARIO WAS REMOVED, THAT THE ARMED FORCES DEFENDED THE CONSTITUTION, ETC., --OUTWEIGH THE NEGATIVE. THE ARMED FORCES HAVE EMERGED WITH A GREATER UNITY OF PURPOSE AMONG THE THREE CINCS AND WITH AN IMPROVED IMAGE. MRS. PERON EMERGED WEAKER THAN EVER. IF THE THREE CINCS WISH TO PRESERVE THEIR POSITION OF STRENGTH, HOWEVER, THEY MUST DELIVER ON THEIR PROMISES TO GET RID OF MRS. PERON AND PRODUCE OTHER POLITICAL SOLUTIONS SOON. VIDELA'S CHRISTMAS EVE SPEECH (TEXT OF WHICH WE ASSUME DEPARTMENT HAS SEEN VIA FBIS) IS A CLEAR WARNING TO THE CIVILIAN POLITICIANS TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM OF THE POWER VACUUM IN THE PRESIDENCY ELSE THE ARMED FORCE THEMSELVES WILL HAVE TO ACT.
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